

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

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Greetings to all members of the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) enterprise and welcome to Issue 28 of the *Countering WMD Journal*.

This issue is built around the timely theme of biodefense. Ever since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, our leaders have wrestled both with the operational and strategic implications of biological threats and hazards. Scoping the impact of this ever-evolving threat has always been difficult. In today's world, faced with a rapidly evolving global security environment and growing resource constraints, leaders face even greater challenges as they decide what investments are required to prepare the Department for future threats.

While I'm certain the readers of this Journal don't require convincing, it is no understatement to say that the safety, security, and well-being of our nation, as well as the combat effectiveness of our Army and the Joint Force hang in the balance as we address this rapidly developing and elusive threat. As we think back to the pandemic itself, we can all remember the tremendous impact COVID-19 had on force flow, readiness building, security cooperation activities, and even the basic administrative tasks—schools, assignment cycles, preventive health care—required to keep the Joint Force ready to fight. While the quarantining of the *U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt* in May of 2020 made headlines, the actual impacts of COVID-19 on the Joint Force were quiet, insidious, and devastating to the long-term readiness of the force.

It is useful at the outset to remember the definition of biodefense which includes “actions to counter biological threats, reduce biological risks, and prepare for, respond to, and recover from biological incidents, whether naturally occurring, accidental or deliberate in origin.” The policy implications of known and emerging biological hazards and threats are of keen interest to senior leaders across the Department of Defense.

For much of my career, the discussion of biothreats conjured images of the response to the Amerithrax incidents of 2001. I, myself was called to respond to many “suspect” anthrax calls while I was serving as a member of the 62nd Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams in LA, but it took a global pandemic to break us out of our narrow mindset focused on biological warfare agents. The restrictions on movement imposed by COVID-19 forced us to recognize that even naturally occurring biological hazards can be a potent challenge to the strategic mobility that makes the Joint Force such an effective instrument of national power.

While the pandemic highlighted the operational and strategic consequences of failure to counter infectious pathogens, the urgency of the threat is heightened by the rapid spread of biotechnology that is both dual-use and hard to attribute. As you will see in this issue, there is a great deal of work already underway to address this unique challenge. But there remains much more to be done.

At the national level, the 2022 *National Biological Defense Strategy and Implementation Plan* (NBS) envisions a world free from catastrophic biological incidents and lays out a set of objectives to effectively counter the spectrum of biological threats, enhance pandemic preparedness, and achieve global health security.

The DOD's 2023 *Biodefense Posture Review* (BPR), a first-of-its-kind, synchronizes the Department's biodefense planning with the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), the NBS, and the efforts of allies and partners. It aligns with the overarching objectives of the NDS and its priorities support NBS goals and DOD's assigned roles and responsibilities in achieving them. The BPR outlines DOD biodefense missions and priorities, responsibilities, authorities, and needed capabilities, and it establishes several reform initiatives including a strategic approach to biodefense that focuses on Total Force preparedness through rapid response and resilience.

The Army led the way in biological defense when it published its 2021 *Army Biological Defense Strategy* (ABDS), which serves as the Army's guiding document in preparedness and response to biological threats and hazards. The ABDS outlines four Lines of Effort (LOE) that will enable the Army to: expand and share scientific, medical, and operational biodefense knowledge to hedge against strategic surprise; gain and maintain biodefense situational awareness to support decision-making; modernize biological defense policy, research, development, test, and evaluation (RDT&E), capabilities, and force structure; and create readiness to respond to biological incidents while projecting force during competition, conflict, and crisis.

When brought to fruition, the ABDS will permit the Army to recognize operational and strategic risks from biological threats and hazards, demonstrate resilience, protect the Total Army from biological threats, and mitigate the impact of biological incidents.

All these strategic efforts create the framework for our organizations to address the Department's vulnerabilities to a range of biological threat and hazards. But, like any strategic document, the implementation of each is what will determine their impact.

In Issue 28, in addition to our regular material on CWMD policy, science, and technology, you will find articles on barriers to biological weapons development as a pathway disruption, bi-lateral biodefense research with Japan as part of the research and engineering scientist exchange

program, operational survivability in a biological environment, and a historical perspective on exploiting naturally occurring biological outbreaks for military gain.

Our adversaries' capabilities and ambitions in biodefense and WMD—while not fully known—are very likely expanding. The work you and your organizations do is vital, significant, and essential. My entire team stands ready to support you as we work together to improve the resilience and readiness of the force. Please do not hesitate to let us know how we can help.

Finally, enjoy this thought-provoking and insightful issue! I learned a great deal from perusing the content and I know you will as well. As always, please send us your comments and ideas on how we can provide better support or improve the *Countering WMD Journal*. ■